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SUBJECT: ROC ADVOCATES CREATION OF AN INTER-RELIGIOUS
COUNCIL IN UNESCO

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) External Church Relations Chairman Archbishop Hilarion advocated to the Ambassador for interfaith dialogue through the creation of an Inter-Religious Council within UNESCO and the strengthening of inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian relationships. Hilarion explained these foreign policy priorities of the ROC included strengthening the ROC's relationship with the Patriarch of Constantinople, working with the Catholic Church and reaching out to help organize the ROC's global diasporas. Hilarion also argued that Russia's demographic problem was a spiritual rather than economic concern. End Summary.

ROC Advocates Creation of UNESCO Inter-Religious Council

¶2. (SBU) Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev, Chairman of the ROC Department for External Church Relations (DECR), hosted Ambassador on July 20, 2009 at his office in Moscow. Accompanying the Archbishop was the Deputy Chairman of the DECR, Father Philip. Following the recent July 6-8 US-Russia Presidential Summit, which included a meeting between President Obama and ROC Patriarch Kirill, the Archbishop commented on the importance of the ROC to strengthen international interfaith dialogue. He explained the ROC wanted to strengthen not only inter-Orthodox relationships but also inter-Christian and non-Christian relationships. Specifically, the Archbishop hopes to enhance these relationships through an Inter-Religious Council the ROC plans to create in dialogue with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

¶3. (SBU) Hilarion and Father Philip said that the ROC would participate in a meeting of Religious leaders from multiple faiths in Moscow on July 21 in preparation for a meeting on July 22 with the UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura. Patriarch Kirill will participate in both meetings. RF President Dmitry Medvedev will meet Director-General Matsuura and the religious leaders on July 21. The ROC wants to create an Inter-Religious Council composed of leaders from various faiths to include ROC, Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, Jewish and Buddhism, and hopefully create a permanent secretariat in the council at UNESCO. Hilarion envisioned that the council would propose ideas to create permanent mechanisms for inter-faith dialogue. He stressed, however, the council should provide concrete results and not just declarations, and concentrate on a broad range of global issues such as religious defamation, tolerance, education, holy places and pilgrimage sites.

¶4. (SBU) The religious leaders involved beyond the ROC include President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Chief Rabbi of Israel Yona Metzger, Caucasus Moslems Clerical Office head Sheikh-ul-Islam Allah Shukur Pashazade of Azerbaijan, head of the department for

relations with foreign countries and other Christian confessions of the Evangelical Church of Germany Bishop Martin Schindehutte, the Holy See official representative to Russia, Archbishop Antonio Menini, and Deputy Secretary-General of the World Islamic League Mohammad Hayat of Saudi Arabia. According to the Archbishop, Saudi Arabia is very involved in the initiative for the Inter-Religious Council. He also elaborated that eventually he hoped the leaders would broaden the group to consist of approximately 25 to 30 members representing multiple faiths.

Patriarch of Constantinople and Inter-Orthodox Relationships

15. (SBU) As chairman of the DECR, Hilarion explained that along with interfaith relations, the primary task of the DECR's foreign policy was to improve relations within the Orthodox churches. A priority among these remains the ROC relationship with the Patriarch of Constantinople. Hilarion hoped to see the relationship with Constantinople move from a "situation of confrontation to one of cooperation and mutual trust." During the recent meetings between Patriarch Kirill and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and the whole of Greek Orthodox Church, Kirill offered suggestions to Bartholomew to help the situation for the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey.

16. (SBU) The Archbishop stated the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey had restrained its activities and faced a shrinking congregation. Bartholomew wants to reopen theological schools, restore churches and improve places of pilgrimage. Hilarion believed the ROC could help Bartholomew accomplish

MOSCOW 00001876 002 OF 003

these goals. Kirill met with the Turkish Prime Minister in Ankara following his meetings with Bartholomew in early July 2009 and expressed these concerns. The Archbishop was also concerned about the Greek Orthodox Church's shrinking pastoral community and the large number of Russians living in and visiting Turkey. According to Hilarion, many of these Russians are Orthodox and would welcome opportunities for worship in Turkey. He assured the Ambassador, however, that the ROC would not build any structures of its own in Turkey.

17. (SBU) Beyond the relationship with Constantinople, Hilarion was not overly optimistic about full reconciliation of the Orthodox churches. He referred to the recent inter-Orthodox meeting in Switzerland in June 2009 where it was discussed how to organize better Orthodox diasporas and increase unity among the various Orthodox groups around the world. He stated that a key issue of the ROC on diasporas and a main difference with the Ecumenical Patriarch was that the ROC still holds to its own diasporas, some of which are centuries old, while the Ecumenical Patriarch believed they belong to him. Hilarion thought it would be impossible to bring all the diasporas automatically into one church. Instead, he offered his vision of one Orthodox Church within a city but with five or more Bishops each representing distinct ethnic or linguistic groups. The Archbishop believed the same was possible for the Orthodox churches in the United States. Specifically, he hoped for the formation of a single Orthodox Church in the United States embracing all separate Orthodox jurisdictions with Bishops responsible for ethnically and linguistically distinguished congregations.

Inter-Christian Relationships

18. (SBU) The Archbishop also stated that inter-Christian relationships could be strengthened but emphasized more of the ROC's relationship with the Catholic Church than with Protestant churches. Instead of concentrating on differences, he believed the ROC could work with the Catholic Church to work against common challenges such as militant secularism and violent Islam. Hilarion felt the solution

with ROC's relationship with Protestant churches was much less obvious. He stated there were significant differences on a theological level and moral teachings between the ROC and Protestant churches, and believed that some Protestant teachings were a strong liberalization of moral teachings. He did not think the ROC and the Protestant churches could speak with a common voice.

Russia's Demographic Problem

¶9. (SBU) To fight Russia's demographic problem, Hilarion stated, was a problem that could not be solved exclusively by the state or the church but would require cooperation. He believed that only the church could provide the necessary teachings of the meaning and importance of family to help solve the problem. He argued that Russia's demographic problem was not economic but spiritual because the meaning of family was lost through secularism and materialism. Hilarion believed modern families no longer viewed a large family as a blessing. Further, he did not believe Russia's Soviet history and mentality had a greater effect on the demographic problem, because other countries that did not live through a Soviet-like regime were experiencing similar problems.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Comment. Archbishop Hilarion has the position, influence and charisma to remain a strong leader of the ROC and perhaps eventual successor to Patriarch Kirill. As Kirill's hand-picked replacement as DECR Chairman, Hilarion is likely to stay closely in step with Kirill in policies and opinions. Hilarion is a young, energetic, talented and worldly leader within the ROC, not unlike his mentor Kirill. He speaks fluent English, holds two doctoral degrees from Oxford and St. Sergius Orthodox Institute in Paris and has a good relationship with the ROC in America -- including a stint delivering lectures in Alaska. With this impressive background, Hilarion will at a minimum serve as an appealing international face of the ROC. Hilarion appeared sincere about creating interfaith dialogue and improving inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian relationships, but clearly not to the detriment of ROC authority. In fact, Hilarion likely sees the Inter-Religious Council and outreach to the

MOSCOW 00001876 003 OF 003

diasporas as an opportunity to expand ROC authority and influence. End Comment.
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